Local & State

Anti-gay church plans return

Group will rally against vice mayor and what it claims are pro-gay policies of Focus

By ED SEALOVER
THE GAZETTE

After picketing Palmer High School last Friday, the anti-gay Westboro Baptist Church plans to return to Colorado Springs next week to protest Vice Mayor Richard Skorman.

The Topeka, Kan.-based group led by the Rev. Fred Phelps also will picket City Hall and the Gay and Lesbian Fund on Thursday.

Then, on April 30, the church will protest what it claims are the pro-gay policies of the conservative Christian ministry Focus on the Family.

When 10 church members waved signs reading "God Hates Fags" outside the high school, they were shouted down by about 500 counter-protesters across Platte and Nevada avenues. Before that, Skorman tried to get the council to pass a resolution denouncing Phelps and Westboro.

The vice mayor's actions riled Westboro leaders enough that they decided to picket outside his business, Poor Richard's Restaurant on Tejon Street.

"We just need to remind the man there is a God, there is a stand, there is a hell, there is a day of judgment and that it's not OK to be gay," said Shirley Phelps-Roper, the church's attorney. The group is known nationally for its anti-gay protests.

It has picketed former President Bill Clinton and first lady Laura Bush, gay-friendly churches and Christian evangelist Jerry Falwell, the Girl Scouts and a showing of "The Nutcracker" in which children performed in tights.

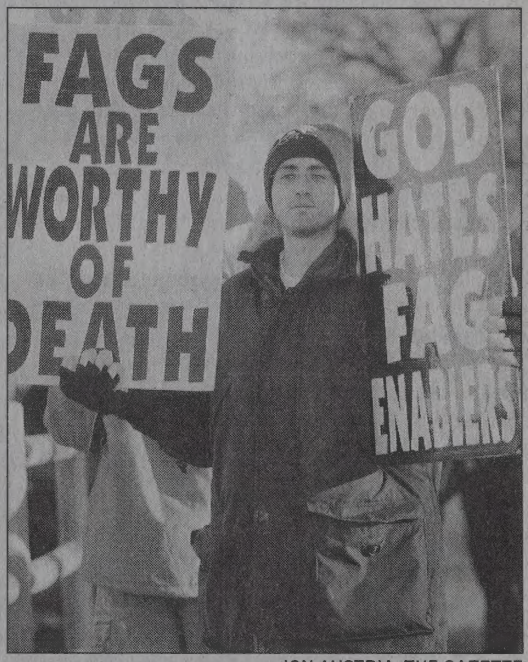
But members rarely if ever have traveled to picket a local official. Skorman said he's "not happy (they're) coming back."

Rather than plan another massive counter-protest, Citizens Project, a local activist group, is hoping to put together a discussion about tolerance during the church's protest.

"I wish they'd go away in some respects," Citizens Project Executive Director Ellie Collinson said. "But in some ways, I also feel thankful to them that we can encourage debate in our own ranks."

The Focus on the Family picketing will happen the same weekend that a national gay-rights group, Soulforce, protests outside Focus headquarters in northern Colorado Springs over what it calls the ministry's anti-gay policies.

Focus Vice President Tom Minnery said Phelps "should be pitied."



JON AUSTRIA, THE GAZETTE

Westboro Baptist Church member Ben Phelps pickets in front of Palmer High School last week. The Topeka, Kan., church opposed the idea of forming a Gay Straight Alliance at Palmer.

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SENTENCE: Original charges of misconduct, assault carried possible 44-year prison term

FROM PAGE 1

Iraqi prisoner was handed a shovel and told to dig a grave where he would be buried if he didn't provide information.

A prosecution witness at the sentencing hearing said the Iraqi was shaking and crying as he used the shovel.

"He wasn't digging very fast because he wasn't concentrating on digging," Staff Sgt. Robert Cureton said.

In addition to the trial evidence, jurors also heard from character witnesses before the sentencing.

Martin's mother, Jessie Watts, left the stand sobbing after describing her son's childhood, saying he played with military toys and always yearned to be a soldier.

"He just loved the idea of wanting to serve his country," she said.

Two officers and a sergeant who had served with Martin asked the jury to keep the captain in uniform.

"I would be ready and willing to pack up and go again (to Iraq) with him," said Sgt. 1st Class Jerome Huffmon. "I know I would be taken care of."

Galligan said that although the sentence allows Martin to stay in the Army for now, Martin's career in uniform could still be scuttled by what happened in Iraq.

The letter of reprimand and conviction could leave Martin stranded with no hope of promotion and with the possibility of administrative dismissal from the service.

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DEATHS

ROBERTA B. COX
Born May 24, 1939. Died March 15, 2005.
Waitress, 22-year Security resident. Survived by her husband, Steve Potter; and a daughter, Tonya Marble. Visitation, 5 to 8 p.m. today, Shrine of Remembrance Funeral Home.

JOHN HENRY GRIFFIN
Born Aug. 27, 1955. Died March 14, 2005.
Cook, Colorado Springs resident. Survived by his wife, Annie Davenport; and three daughters, Stephanie Davenport, Sharma Griffin and Shamika Griffin. Cappadona's Alternative Funeral Services.

FRANKLYN J. INGALLS
Born Oct. 25, 1946. Died March 14, 2005.
Therapist, five-year Colorado Springs resident. Survived by his mother, Mary; a brother, Tom; and a sister, Betsy. Shrine of Remembrance Funeral Home.

RETIRED COL. JOHN EDWARD SCHMIDT
Born Nov. 30, 1940. Died March 16, 2005.
Air Force/nonprofit president, 26-year Colorado Springs resident. Survived by his wife, Mikki; two sons, John and Ryan; a daughter, Christine Feeley; and two stepdaughters, Heidi Wicks and Jill Greene. Visitation, 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Shrine of Remembrance, "America the Beautiful" Chapel of Roses Services 2

ERIC A. JASEN
Born Oct. 1, 1966. Died March 15, 2005.
Cabinetmaker, 35-year Colorado Springs resident. Survived by his father, Arnold. Mountain View Mortuary.

HELEN I. PATTISON
Born Jan. 17, 1924. Died March 15, 2005.
Retired, 45-year Colorado Springs resident. Survived by three daughters, Sharon Dempsey, Patricia Pattison and Linda Pattison; and a step-son, Morgan Pattison. Services, noon Saturday, Swan Law Cascade Chapel.

JOSEPHINE WANDETOWSKI
Born Jan. 6, 1914. Died March 16, 2005.
Homemaker, four-year Woodland Park resident. Survived by a daughter, Caroline Fives. Graveside services, 11 a.m. Monday, Memorial Gardens Cemetery and Funeral Home.

CECELIA WOOLDRIDGE
Born June 13, 1953. Died March 15, 2005.
Registered nurse, 20-year Colorado Springs resident. Survived by two sons, Brian and Joseph William; and a daughter, Charlene Kelly. Services, 10 a.m.